

# Food, Money and Morals

## Compliance among Natural Resource Harvesters

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### Abstract

A comparative qualitative study of Norwegian and Newfoundland inshore fisheries revealed that compliance with the state's fisheries regulations was governed by a set of moral distinctions which were strikingly similar in the two cases. Violations of government regulations were followed by informal sanctions only in commercial fisheries. Illegal food fishery was generally accepted. A fisherman could also break the law in commercial fisheries without being met with significant sanctions provided that it was generally perceived to be the only way to ensure a necessary outcome. The empirical findings are connected to the moral meanings of money and food, and it is suggested that the economies of natural resource harvesters include two different moral spheres. One of these spheres is linked to subsistence, small-scale operations and local exchange, and is perceived as morally safe. The other sphere is connected with money, large-scale operations and exchange with strangers, and is seen as morally perilous.

Keywords: food, money, morality, compliance, fisheries

## Introduction

This article is based on a comparative study of fishing communities in Norway and Newfoundland, and focuses on people's subjective reasons for obeying or violating the state's fisheries regulations. This topic has been previously addressed in a few surveys, most of which are based on the methodological individualism of neoclassical economics, assuming that the significant processes take place within the minds of single individuals (Blewett et al., 1987; Furlong, 1991; Sutinen and Gauvin, 1989). A few more recent studies on the issue also include concepts of normative action (Hatcher, 2000; Hønneland, 1998, 1999; Kuperan et al., 1997; Nielsen and Mathiesen, 2001). However, data on the dynamics of compliance in fisheries are generally scarce, and this study aims to explore the issue a little further. The analysis presented in the following emerges as an interpretation of two specific cases, but concludes in a general theory on the economic morality of natural resource harvesters. The article can thus be said to have a "grounded theory" approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

I spent two months in each of two fishing communities during a period when they were severely affected by government restrictions on fish harvesting, generating data on fishermen's reasons for complying with or violating regulations, as well as community responses to their choices. Most of the fishing vessels in these communities were small inshore vessels, mostly operating on a day trip basis out of their domestic harbour. This meant that the level of social transparency and social control was high. The question of compliance was thus not a private matter, and social negotiations influenced the fishermen's choices. Although I spoke with most of the active fishermen on a weekly or even daily basis, my choice of informants may be characterised as "snowball-sampling", in the sense that I attempted to reconstruct specific social negotiations by talking to people who had talked to each other. I also generated much data through everyday presence in the milieu, listening to news exchange, discussions and gossip. The fieldwork was conducted during the autumn of 1997 in Norway and the spring of 1998 in Newfoundland.

The article will start out by addressing patterns of compliance with the state's fisheries regulations in the two communities. These patterns will subsequently be compared and interpreted in the light of a theory on the economic morality of natural resource harvesters.

## Morality and Compliance in “Uerhavn”

### *The setting*

The Norwegian fishing community, which I have given the fictional name “Uerhavn”, is located on the tip of a headland in north-western Norway. In 1997, there were 390 inhabitants in Uerhavn<sup>1</sup>, constituting 150 households.

Uerhavn is a fishing community in decline. In the 1960s, the community had a fleet of twelve 45 to 70 foot purse seiners, fishing saithe and herring, and employing approximately 100 people. Most of this fleet vanished during several poor years in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1997, there were only three vessels larger than 40 feet in Uerhavn. These boats operated with a combination of purse seines and gillnets, and had crews of three to seven people. Besides these, there were fourteen decked vessels smaller than 40 feet, eight of which could be classified as “professionally active”. These vessels were one or two-man operated, and fished with gillnets and automatic jigging machines<sup>2</sup>.

Uerhavn's fishing vessels go north to participate in the Lofoten cod fishery in February, March and April. The smaller vessels are largely dependent on the domestic saithe fisheries for the rest of the year. The purse seiners are somewhat more adaptable, as they participate in both groundfish and pelagic fisheries.

In 1997, there were 60 registered fishermen in Uerhavn, and 36 of these fished full-time. Most of the part-time fishermen were retired full-timers. The number of registered fishermen had declined by approximately 40 % since the mid 1980s<sup>3</sup>, and the total population of the community had dropped by about 20 % in the same period. None the less, fishing and fish processing were still by far the most important industries in the community, and the local fish processing plant employed almost 30 people.

The decline of the fishing community was a matter of great concern to Uerhavn's residents. The fishermen worried about the future of their profession and about the viability of their

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Norway, National Population Register.

<sup>2</sup> The automatic jigging machine is a mechanical device which imitates the traditional handline jigging. One man may operate several of these machines, fishing as efficiently as if he had a crew of three or four men.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Norway, Census of fishermen.

community, and this worry was relevant to their attitude in terms of compliance with state regulations.

The fishermen's wives mostly worked outside the fisheries sector, which increased the income stability of the households<sup>4</sup>. As a supplement to monetary income, Uerhavn's fishermen have traditionally fished for the household as well as for the market, and still do so today. The fisheries receive little or no income support from the state, as state subsidies to the Norwegian fisheries were by and large abolished in the 1990s<sup>5</sup>.

Uerhavn's harbour is placed at the centre of the community, and the fish processing plant is located near by. The wharf is a social meeting place as much as it is a working place, and the level of social transparency is high. The intimacy and social transparency of the Uerhavn community provides for efficient social control, and breaking common moral rules thus implies a significant risk of informal social sanctions such as becoming an object of rumours, gossip and consequent social degradation or exclusion. There are few, if any, alternative collectivities to join in the case of social exclusion, and being the object of back-biting and public blame is perceived as threatening.

### *The Morality of Compliance*

Some of Uerhavn's fishermen were severely affected by the state's catch regulations at the time of my fieldwork, and the fishermen's choices of compliance or non-compliance was not a private matter. The fishermen were well informed about each other's situations, and several fishermen also spoke openly among colleagues about their intentions and doubts in matters of compliance. The question of compliance triggered off extensive social negotiations among the fishermen, and frequently came up during conversations in the public meeting places. A fisherman who considered breaking the law thus had to relate to the moral judgement of the collectivity. The fishermen who broke the law or considered doing so expressed concern about the opinions of colleagues, and their choices reflected this concern. Secrecy was generally hard to achieve in this community, and very few fishermen violated fisheries regulations if they risked being condemned among colleagues.

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<sup>4</sup> This is what Pettersen (1994) has called a "woman buffer-household" (my translation).

<sup>5</sup> For an outline of the development of the state subsidies to the Norwegian fish harvesting industry, see Hegrenes et al. (2002).

This meant that the fishermen's choices of compliance and non-compliance followed a pattern defined by collective moral norms. In order to understand this pattern, I thus had to explore this collective morality. My main sources were observations of public negotiations and gossip, and repeated interviews with the fishermen. The data covered a wide range of regulations in several different fisheries, but the principles of moral judgment were similar in all of these.

Informal and semi-structured interviews with the 25 fishermen that were the most professionally and socially active in Uerhavn's fisheries revealed that there was very little disagreement among the fishermen on what the basic common rules were, meaning that the fishermen had a common understanding of the collective morality. These findings were also consistent with my observational data. On the other hand, as we will see in the following, a shared understanding of the basic moral principles did not mean that the moral evaluation of specific situations was always agreed on or experienced as easy.

In order to illustrate these moral distinctions, I will refer some specific incidents from Uerhavn's fisheries.

### *Example 1: Maximising profit beyond the law*

Norwegian law requires all fishermen to sell their fish through the fishermen's sales organizations (Norway, 1951). In practice, this means selling the fish to an authorised fish buyer. However, selling the fish directly on the black market may provide a significant extra profit compared to ordinary legal sales.

"Gunnar" is a skilled, respected and successful fisherman who operates his own fishing vessel. He lives in the middle of the village and keeps his boat in Uerhavn's harbour. He is socially active, and accepted as a natural part of Uerhavn's collectivity of professional fish harvesters. However, at one point "Gunnar" started selling significant parts of his catches on the black market. Together with a colleague he loaded his catch onto a trailer, drove out of the village, and sold privately. They started doing this on a regular basis, and as "Gunnar" himself puts it, they did so "on a large scale". Information about this activity eventually was spread in the community, and generated some significant gossip about "Gunnar" and his colleague, who consequently quit their illegal practice immediately. "Gunnar" experienced the situation as highly unpleasant, and felt that he was about to lose his good reputation in the community.

### *Example 2: Economic hardships and illegal adaption*

Uerhavn's fishing fleet depends on saithe fisheries for large parts of the year. Fishing groundfish in local waters normally means that most of the catch consists of saithe. At the time of my fieldwork, a strict total allowable catch (TAC)<sup>6</sup> for saithe led to an early closure of this fishery for a large part of Uerhavn's fleet. A certain by-catch percentage of saithe was allowed<sup>7</sup>, but it was not realistic to fish groundfish in Uerhavn's waters without greatly exceeding this limit. In effect, a closure of the saithe fishery was a closure of Uerhavn's groundfish fisheries. When the fishery closed, most of the affected vessels had either managed to ensure a satisfactory season, or they had other fishing possibilities. The fishermen thus pulled out of the saithe fishery, and either stayed on land or fished for pelagic species.

However, a few of the affected boats were particularly severely hit by the closure, as they had had poor seasons and lacked the necessary gear and licenses for participation in pelagic fisheries. A couple of these boats continued fishing for groundfish. It was generally recognized among the fishermen that this implied getting illegal amounts of saithe. One way of solving this problem was to conceal illegal catch by falsifying purchase slip<sup>8</sup> information. Such falsification is illegal and one of the most commonly-reported violations of Norwegian fisheries law<sup>9</sup>. Despite the common understanding that the few vessels that continued fishing concealed illegal by-catch through falsification of purchase slips, these boats did not become objects of any significant back-biting or moral blame among their law-abiding colleagues. However, the situation generated considerable uneasiness, and was frequently discussed.

In these discussions, two basic moral principles were particularly important. On the one hand, there was the moral obligation to obey the law. Doing something "illegal" was basically viewed as morally wrong, and becoming a "lawbreaker" was connected with

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<sup>6</sup> Total allowable catch is the total amount allowed to be harvested from a certain fish stock.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Norway, Fisheries regulations: J-170-95; J-188-96; J-196-96; J-187-96; J-224-96; J-66-97; J-70-97; J-156-97; J-157-97; J-171-97; J-170-97; J-180-97; J-185-97; J-195-97.

<sup>8</sup> The fisherman and the fish buyer are required by law to fill in and sign a purchase slip which shall contain correct information on the amount of each species landed at delivery (Norway, 1990). The purchase slip is essential to the state's implementation of quota regulations.

<sup>9</sup> Source: enforcement statistics from *the Directorate of Fisheries*.

significant personal discomfort. On the other hand, there was the perceived right to make a reasonable living from fishing. It was generally agreed that breaking the law was the only way for those particular fishermen to ensure a satisfactory outcome. This did not mean that the violations were unconditionally and unanimously accepted, but rather that they triggered off moral doubt and moral conflict which left the collectivity incapable of sanctions. None of the affected vessels which had made a good income before the closure attempted to continue fishing groundfish. In the interviews, the fishermen clearly stated that such a thing would not have been tolerated.

In the morality of Uerhavn's fishermen there was a fundamental distinction between moderation and excess. Consequently, the question of scale was an important part of their moral judgement. Breaking a rule on a small scale in order to ensure a necessary income did not imply any great risk of public condemnation. However, if a fisherman was perceived as breaking rules "on a large scale" in order to maximise his personal profit, such as "Gunnar" in example 1, he became an object of back-biting, social degradation and potential exclusion.

When I finished my fieldwork in Uerhavn, there was a minor anomaly in my observations, which puzzled me somewhat. The data on commercial fisheries were consistent and made sense within the moral system outlined in examples 1 and 2. However, it appeared that food fisheries were not subjected to the same degree of moral vigilance. The example below may provide a fair illustration of this.

### *Example 3: Illegal food fisheries*

In 1989 the Norwegian government closed the drift net fisheries for salmon permanently. This had been a controversial issue for many years, and generated massive resistance among professional fishermen (Knudsen, 1979; Norway, 1987, 1989; Norwegian Fishermen's Association, 1990). A couple of Uerhavn's fishing crews depended on this fishery, and also Uerhavn's fishermen resisted the ban. However, Uerhavn's drift net crews successfully managed to readjust after the closure and are now doing well in other fisheries. It has been many years since any of Uerhavn's fishermen depended on these fisheries, and illegal salmon fisheries for the purpose of sale are not accepted in Uerhavn today. However, a number of Uerhavn's fishermen still fish salmon illegally for food. This poaching activity is not met with gossip, ambivalence or frequent discussions in the community. It is generally considered morally acceptable and consequently not connected with extensive secrecy.

As shown by examples 1 and 2, the moral obligation to obey the law was pronounced in commercial fisheries. In commercial fisheries it was not uncontroversial that fishermen broke the law, even when they did so in order to resolve a difficult situation. The absence of significant sanctions in such cases was largely due to a moral conflict. When the moral obligation to obey the law was so prominent in discussions on violations in commercial fisheries, how could illegal food fishery be so uncontroversial? A subsequent fieldwork among Newfoundland fishermen, focusing on the same topic, generated data which I believe may shed light on this question.

### *Morality and Resource Conservation in "Little Spruce Harbour"*

#### The Setting

The infrastructure of the Newfoundland community, which I have given the fictional name "Little Spruce Harbour", is quite similar to its Norwegian counterpart. Little Spruce Harbour is a fishing community of 350 people, constituting 130 households. It is located in a sheltered cove in one of the bays on the eastern coast of Newfoundland. There are few employment opportunities besides fishing and fish processing, which are the only significant industries in the community.

There are 55 registered fishers<sup>10</sup> in Little Spruce Harbour<sup>11</sup>. Fifteen crews use the community's harbour as a base for fishing, and twelve of these consist of Little Spruce Harbour's own residents. There are nine decked fishing vessels, ranging from 34 to 60 feet. In addition there are 35 open boats, ranging from 12 to 30 feet. A local fish processing plant provides periodical employment for approximately 50 people.

Prior to the collapse of the Newfoundland groundfish fisheries from 1992 onwards, the economy of the fisher households of the community was based on a combination of income from fishing, unpaid work and fishermen's employment insurance (EI) in the winter<sup>12</sup>. In terms of fishing, cod fisheries with traps, gillnets and handlines, as well as capelin fisheries with traps and

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term "fisher" instead of "fisherman", as quite a few women fished professionally in this community.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Professional Fish Harvesters' Certification Board Newfoundland & Labrador

<sup>12</sup> For details on the system of fishermen's EI, see Hanrahan (1993). See Omohundro (1994) for descriptions of subsistence production in Newfoundland communities.



seines were the most important. In 1992 the cod fisheries on Newfoundland's east coast were closed, and in 1994 moratoria were introduced on fishing for most other groundfish species in the area. These moratoria marked the beginning of a lasting ecological and social crisis in Newfoundland's fisheries, and were still in effect at the time of my fieldwork in 1998 (See FRCC, 1997, 1998; Steele et al., 1992; Williams, 1996). While Uerhavn is a fishing community in gradual decline, Little Spruce Harbour faced a more or less constant threat of rapid depopulation.

Historically, cod has been the backbone of the Newfoundland fisheries, which have been an important part of Newfoundland's economy and an essential part of its identity (Felt and Locke, 1995; Harris, 1990, pp. 19-21). The fisheries are still vital for securing settlement in many rural communities. Codfish thus has a particular status as a common good in the minds of most Newfoundlanders, and awareness of this fact is necessary to understand the morality of compliance in relation to the cod moratorium.

Compared to many other Newfoundland fishing villages, Little Spruce Harbour managed to keep its fisheries community relatively intact during these hardships. This was mainly because of three factors. First, Little Spruce Harbour's fisheries had traditionally depended on a combination of groundfish and pelagic species. Secondly, a great increase in snow crab prices provided new income possibilities for the fishing fleet. Thirdly, the state introduced a special income support program in the wake of the groundfish moratoria which largely compensated for the loss of income from the cod fisheries. At the time of my fieldwork, pot fisheries for crab and lobster, gillnet and seine fisheries for herring, and trap fisheries for capelin were the main fisheries in Little Spruce Harbour.

Compared to Uerhavn, the household economies of Little Spruce Harbour are seldom divided between economic sectors. Fishermen's wives often join their husbands' fishing crews. Government income support is thus the main economic buffer of the household. As in Uerhavn, food fisheries have traditionally constituted a significant part of the fishers' economies in Little Spruce Harbour. However, the cod moratorium included food fisheries as well as commercial fisheries, and Canadian authorities enforced this ban very strictly. Even household poaching implied a genuine risk of being prosecuted and fined. Hunting, logging, berry picking, and building of houses, boats and gear still contributed significantly to the household economies.

Little Spruce Harbour is socially intimate and transparent, similar to Uerhavn. All residents know each other well, and rumours spread easily. The risk of being subjected to gossip and social degradation has great regulatory force, and the social control is thus efficient. Not only the people in the community were closely connected. There were strong ties, in Granovetter's terms (1973),

also *between* communities in this region, and the whole area must be regarded as socially transparent.

### *The Morality of Compliance*

Despite the poor condition of the cod stock of eastern Newfoundland, cod was relatively abundant in certain places, and the Little Spruce Harbour area was one of these. The question of compliance was thus particularly relevant in relation to cod.

Little Spruce Harbour's fishers regarded the groundfish collapse as rooted not only in inadequate science and unwise management, which are generally recognised to be the causes of the collapse, but also in excessive demands. Most fishers believed that overfishing caused the collapse, and that the great offshore trawlers were particularly responsible. Many fishers regarded the big trawlers as manifestations of human greed, and held that greed was the deeper source of the fisheries crisis.

A large majority of people in this part of Newfoundland believed that the government was right to close the cod fisheries (Ommer, 1998), and Little Spruce Harbour's fishers were no exception. Albeit most fishers in this area believed that a limited test fishery could be justified at the time of my fieldwork, it was almost unanimously agreed that the stock was vulnerable and that extreme caution was necessary. The morality of compliance among Little Spruce Harbour's fishers was connected to a perceived moral obligation to contribute to the protection of a common good. Protection of the cod stock was regarded a collective responsibility, and the moral distinctions were unambiguous, taken for granted, and absolute. The regulatory force of this collectively negotiated morality is indicated by the fact that none of my 30 informants diverged from the common view on this issue. The moral distinctions are illustrated in examples 4 and 5.

#### *Example 4: Commercial cod poaching*

At the time of my fieldwork, a group of men were arrested, charged with cod poaching. None of the men involved came from Little Spruce Harbour, but the group included people from several communities in the surrounding area. Canadian authorities suspected that the poaching activities of this group had been going on for years, on an organised, commercial basis. There were close social connections between the communities in this region, and when the arrests were made, I had already heard rumours about these activities for some time. It seemed that Little Spruce Harbour's residents were well informed. When I read the media reports, which were based on information

from police investigations, later on, they confirmed much of the information I had heard previously in rumours.

Little Spruce Harbour's residents were frustrated and indignant that someone had made poaching a commercial business, and they were explicit about it. These poachers were objects of strong and unambiguous moral blame. My informants also made clear that they knew who these poachers were, and that they did not associate with them. The fact that they constituted an organised group, made them emerge as a criminal sub-group, partly excluded from the larger collectivity<sup>13</sup>. Some informants compared them with the mafia.

The degree of social exclusion was perhaps best demonstrated by people's fear of these poachers. There were rumours that they threatened people, and many feared physical acts of vengeance if they informed on them. People complained that these poachers did not care that they were objects of intense rumours and gossip, and they consequently requested more formal surveillance of such poaching activities. The normal mechanisms of informal social control were thus put out of force in this case, and the relationship between the two groups was largely regulated by mutual deterrence.

When people denounced these activities, they usually referred to the fact that the poaching was done for money. This was normally connected with the argument that the poachers did it on a large scale, and thus destroyed a common good which others suffered to protect. It was also frequently mentioned that the poachers received money from the government's income support program, and that they consequently already had what they needed.

#### *Example 5: Cod poaching for the purpose of food*

Despite the general support for the cod moratorium, people disagreed with the ban on food fisheries. It was unanimously agreed that household fishing represented no threat to the fish stock and should be allowed. While commercial poachers were objects of severe moral condemnation and social exclusion, household poachers met no informal

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<sup>13</sup> In such small and intimate social settings, the mechanisms of exclusion are generally subtle, and may not be easy to observe for a stranger. Exclusion generally takes the form of slight changes of communication pattern, such that conversations with outsiders emerge as comparatively short and superficial.

sanctions. When Little Spruce Harbour residents condemned the commercial poachers, they generally contrasted them with those who only poached for household use, people with whom they sympathised. Little Spruce Harbour fishers requested more enforcement in terms of commercial poaching, but they responded with fury when household poachers were arrested and convicted. The moral distinction between poaching for money and poaching for food constituted an essential part of the collective identity of Little Spruce Harbour's fisher people. Poaching for household could consequently take place fairly openly, such as during squid fishing where many boats are tied together. Small amounts of codfish, poached exclusively for the purpose of food, could also be exchanged as gifts between the boats in such situations.

Fishermen from other parts of Newfoundland as well as enforcement personnel confirmed that the moral distinction between food poaching and commercial poaching was general to Newfoundland. I also found the same distinction in relation to game poaching.

The morality of compliance in Little Spruce Harbour included two basic moral norms. First, there was the obligation to obey rules established to protect the common good. This was basically a norm against free riding. Secondly, there was the right to catch what you needed for your own household. A striking feature of the Little Spruce Harbour case was that nobody seemed to experience any conflict between these two moral norms. I was particularly struck by a story told by one of my informants about two fishermen who had poached for food until their small and scarcely seaworthy boat took overload and capsized. They had chosen to fish at night in order to reduce the risk of being caught, and consequently one of the men swam in the wrong direction in the dark and drowned. What struck me was not the story as such, but how my informant presented it. This story could very easily have been presented as an example of the foolishness of greed, but it was not. It was presented as an example of how the government's intolerable ban on food fisheries led to tragic outcomes. The moral distinction between food and money was related to the distinction between greed and moderate demands, but it seemed that this connection did not entirely depend on the actual scale of the activities. The symbolic meaning of money and food seemingly had deeper roots, an issue we will return to later on.

## Common Moralities

In both cases studied, the morality of compliance was largely shaped by moral distinctions between moderation and excess, and between money and food. People were under a moral obligation to comply with regulations in terms of commercial fisheries, but not in terms of food

fisheries. In Uerhavn, we saw that small boat fishermen could be met with some degree of understanding, albeit not unanimous support, if they broke a regulation in commercial fisheries provided that they did it to resolve a situation of economic *force majeure*. In Newfoundland the fisher's economies basically depended on governmental income support, so it was difficult to find comparable situations. However, government plans to close the income support program down in the near future, generated fishermen's threats of resuming commercial cod fishing. A new financial support package, a minor reopening of the cod fishery, and good crab prices eventually resolved the situation, but the rhetoric revealed moral values reminiscent of Uerhavn's fishermen's perceived right to secure a satisfactory outcome.

The similarities between these communities suggest that we have seen signs of a more general moral system relating to the meaning of food, commerce, moderation and excess. The morality of compliance in the two communities appears to be organised along a line stretching from food to excessive monetary income, as outlined in Table 1.

*Table 1. Summary of Empirical Findings*

	Aim of economic activity		
	Food	Satisfactory monetary income	Excessive monetary income
Degree of compliance with regulations	Wide-spread non-compliance	Some incidents of non-compliance	Few incidents of non-compliance
Informal social sanctions following non-compliance	No negative sanctions. Unambiguous acceptance.	Weak negative sanctions. Moral ambivalence.	Strong negative sanctions. Unambiguous condemnation.
Justification of sanctions or moral support	Right to catch for food. Harmless activity.	Right to necessary income. Obligation to comply.	Large scale. Threatening the common good.

The fishers in Uerhavn and Little Spruce Harbour regard food as morally innocent. Activities aimed to supply food are consequently not subjected to the community's moral vigilance. Such activities are seen as harmless, and state regulation is consequently experienced as misplaced, even offensive.

When the same resource harvesting activities are performed for commercial purposes, the community becomes morally vigilant. The monetary economy is not seen as immanently immoral, but it is experienced as *morally perilous*. People consequently regard state regulation as morally relevant, and sometimes also as necessary.

## Two Spheres of Economic Morality

We have observed the differing morals of subsistence economy and monetary economy in relation to the use of a natural resource. We have also seen that activities aimed at a moderate monetary outcome are treated differently than those aimed at maximum profit. But what are the roots of these moral distinctions? As a first step in an attempt to provide a satisfactory answer, we will address the moral meanings of *money* and *food* a little more closely. It can be argued that these meanings are quite general, and that our local observations thus may form the basis of more general hypotheses.

The basic bodily need for food may generally be considered finite. When you are safe and satisfied more food will not contribute to the satisfaction of this need. A subsistence economy thus puts natural limits to the rational extraction of natural resources. The scale of the enterprise is limited by the needs of the human body, and it is thus experienced as naturally moderate. Consequently, Little Spruce Harbour's fishers did not regard household poaching as a threat to the stock. By contrast, the exchange possibilities accompanying money enable the actor to pursue a more or less infinite range of goals, and money thus removes the natural limit in terms of the sensible scale of the economic activity. Consequently, money sets no natural limit as to when extraction of common pool resources<sup>14</sup> ceases to be rational for the individual. In commercial resource harvesting, as distinct from subsistence harvesting, the actors may become subjected to

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<sup>14</sup> "Common pool resources" are defined as resources which are available to many actors, such that the acts of one user may have "adverse affects upon the interests of other users" (Baden, 1977, p. 139). Air, rivers, game and fisheries resources are typical examples.

the rationality of the herdsmen in Garret Hardin's commons<sup>15</sup> (Hardin, 1968). A monetary outcome can make it rational for each individual to increase his effort without limit, which ultimately may destroy the common pool resource.

In terms of moral meaning, this implies two things. First, commercial harvesting may be perceived as implying a potential threat to the common good. It is thus subjected to moral expectations of compliance with rules regulating extraction of common pool resources. Secondly, money may be perceived as a potential medium through which greed can unfold as economic action. Greed is naturally connected to the question of scale and thus with the issue of unsustainable exploitation of common pool resources, as reflected in several informants' statements. However, greed has also often been viewed as a reprehensible motive in its own right. In western moral and religious thinking, condemnation of desire for material wealth can be found since Plato, who influenced Augustin and thus the teachings of the Christian Church (Doyle, 1999; Plato, 1985, Book VIII, pp. 549-551). The Bible also describes greed as sinful and as a form of worshiping false gods, while seeing moderation as a moral virtue (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; Isa. 56:11; Luke 12:15; Prov. 1:19; Prov. 15:27; Rotter, 1979, p. 184). In other words, greed is not merely experienced as a potential threat to the common good, but has been viewed historically as a force determining the wants of a corrupt soul. Aristotle's writings on economy, which were taken up by Thomas Aquinas and thus influenced the Christian Church, saw subsistence production as a "natural" way of living, while trade was seen as connected with money and thus unlimited desire (Aristotle, 1981; Bloch and Parry, 1989; Parry, 1989). Famous passages in the Bible make similar associations between money and greed (I Timothy 6:8-10; Luke 16: 13). Medieval religious theory and also Martin Luther saw trade as dangerous to the soul. The word "mammon" for instance, is still often used as a synonym for money, while it originally refers to the devil of covetousness or the false god of greed (Harris, 1989, pp. 237-238; Tawney, 1936). It is well known that certain Christian movements developed widespread acceptance of profit and commerce in the early days of

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<sup>15</sup> Garret Hardin's commons is one of the most famous metaphors in the literature on environmental problems. Hardin argued that in a common pasture it would be rational for each herdsman to increase his herd without limit, as he could keep the yield for himself while the costs following the extra grazing pressure would be distributed among all the herdsmen. Consequently, the pasture would be destroyed and all the herdsmen would be ruined. Hardin's model serves as an illustration of how individual rationality may lead to collective catastrophe.

capitalism, and no one would dispute that trade is an acceptable enterprise today (Tawney, 1936; Weber, 1930). However, it can be argued that the strong legacy of moral thinking sceptic of monetary economy left traces in the inert symbolic structures of culture, such that a certain element of moral vigilance associated with money has been transferred into largely-secularised modern societies.<sup>16</sup> Commercial activities may thus still be experienced as *more easily infected by immorality* than subsistence production is, without being seen as immanently immoral. Bloch and Parry (1989, p. 18) argued that earning money has become more and more marginal to, but never quite detached from, the Devil's domain. The history of moral teachings described above may thus possibly contribute to our understanding of the moral meaning of money observed in this study. The persistence of this moral caution may naturally be reinforced by secular factors, such as the rationality of resource use addressed above or the nature of exchange addressed below.

The meanings of money and food may be related to their differing characteristics in terms of exchange. Direct exchange of specific goods will have to be based on specific information regarding the needs of both parties, and these needs must be complementary. Hence such exchange is mostly suitable in contexts where goods and services can be transformed into either long-term obligation or love and respect<sup>17</sup>. This form of exchange thus requires trust and long-lasting social ties. Subsistence production thus tends to involve transactions within a social network of close social relations such as household, kin and community. Hence, it might be experienced as including a wide variety of moral responsibilities and social control. Money, by contrast, allows exchanges to be made within the looser networks of the market, reducing the range of moral responsibilities and

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<sup>16</sup> The congregation of Uerhavn is, apart from a few Baptists, Lutheran protestant and part of the Norwegian state church. The church now mainly serves ritual purposes for most people. Little Spruce Harbour has Methodist, Salvation Army and Pentecostal congregations. Today, most people participate only to a limited extent and the congregations are shrinking, albeit Little Spruce Harbour still has a much more active religious life than Uerhavn. The perceived moral distinction between money and food was unanimous, regardless of creed and connection with the Church.

<sup>17</sup> The significance of long-term obligation and respect in exchange has been described in a classic Newfoundland study. In "Cat Harbour", Faris observed that short-term contracts that were characterised by quick cash payments were mostly used when "strangers" or "outsiders" were involved. Contracts among "insiders" were usually characterised by long-term obligation or "payment" by way of respect rather than immediate payment in cash. Relationships in which cash was used exclusively were regarded as "stranger" relationships (Faris, 1972, pp. 122-124).



the social control involved. Only the diffusion of the monetary system delimits the range of people with which exchange based on money can be made. As money makes exchange independent of long-term obligation, it enables exchange to take place even when the level of trust is modest, and thus also with strangers.

The fact that money allows transactions to be made with strangers has two important implications. First, money means a perceived loss of social control. Secondly, money as such becomes a symbol of strangeness. It can be argued that this symbolic meaning of money is quite general in Western culture. If a close friend does me a favour and I offer him money in return, it is equal to telling him he is not my friend. It can also be argued that strangeness tends to be associated with moral peril. Several authors have shown that the psychology of group formation and social identification leads people to regard their "ingroup", in Sumner's terms (1940), as being "better" than "outgroups" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, 1982, pp. 20-21; Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Turner, 1975, pp. 7-8). This theory suggests that people's distrust in strangers is not only related with the simple fact that we know little about them. It is also connected to basic processes of identity formation and conceptions of "us" and "them".

Money may thus be perceived as symbolising the moral dangers inherent in relationships with strangers. In other words, the medium of exchange has itself become symbolically contaminated by the nature of the relationship in which it is typically being used.

The discussion above suggests that money may be experienced as representing moral danger, and thus as infested with latent impurity. This latent impurity becomes manifest in relation to activities that are immoral or morally ambiguous at the outset. An offender becomes an object of particularly strong abhorrence when his motive is money. Whereas money may contaminate immoral or morally ambiguous acts, food is perceived as purifying. An act that is regarded as technically immoral might be excused when it is committed for the purpose of food. As it represents a fundamental bodily need, food is seen as morally innocent.

In sum, the moral distinction between food and money observed among Norwegian and Newfoundland fishers may reflect a much more wide-spread moral pattern. It can be argued that this pattern emerges in the form of two moral spheres of economic activity. One of these moral spheres is linked to subsistence production, small-scale operations and the goal of ensuring a necessary economic outcome. This sphere is perceived as morally safe. Activities in this sphere are generally met with a moral "green light" indicating that "everything is OK" or "go ahead". In the following, it will thus be referred to as *the green sphere* of economic activity. The other sphere is connected with commerce, large-scale operations and the goal of economic maximising. This

sphere is perceived as morally dangerous. This does not necessarily mean that activities here are seen as immanently immoral, in other words met with a moral “red light”. However, there is a danger of immoral actions, and the actor is required to be aware of this. This sphere will thus be referred to as *the yellow sphere* of economic activity. It can be argued that the two spheres constitute two different and internally coherent frameworks of moral interpretation. The description of these spheres of morality, outlined in Table 2, includes classifications of economic activities as well as the interpretations and moral evaluations connected with them.

*Table 2. The Moral Spheres of Economic Activity*

	Green sphere of economic activity	Yellow sphere of economic activity
Type of economy	Subsistence production.	Market-oriented. Trade.
Means of goal achievement	Food and shelter.	Money.
Form of exchange	Does not involve strangers. Efficient social control.	Potentially involves strangers. Loss of social control.
Attitude of agent	Naturally connected with temperance. Focus on basic needs only.	Allows focus on infinite wants. Greed.
Goal	Limited to the achievement of a satisfactory life.	Maximum profit.
Scale of economic activity	Small-scale.	Large-scale
Moral meaning	Individual right. Compatible with solidarity and moral virtue. No threat to common good.	Satisfaction of personal desires potentially threatens the common good. Potential for idolatry/spiritual corruption.
Basic moral classification	Morally safe.	Morally dangerous.
External regulation	Inappropriate.	Appropriate.

In both communities we found a clear distinction between food fishery and commercial fishery with regard to the moral obligation to obey the state’s regulations. The instances where governmental regulations were informally enforced could all be classified as belonging to the

yellow sphere. The moral perils of the yellow sphere imply that external regulation is perceived as relevant and potentially necessary. The yellow sphere thus emerges as the domain of legitimate governance by the state. By contrast, governmental regulations concerning green sphere activities are perceived as misplaced, and are consequently not informally enforced.

The Uerhavn case showed us instances of illegal practices which took place in commercial fisheries, but still did not trigger off significant social sanctions. I believe the outline of the two moral spheres can account for these as well. In Uerhavn's commercial fisheries, we saw that moral conflict prevented violations from resulting in negative sanctions if these violations were perceived as necessary in order to secure a needed cash income. On the one hand, these violations aimed to ensure a monetary income, which is a hallmark of the yellow sphere. On the other hand, they only aimed to secure a modest and *necessary* outcome, which is a feature of the green sphere. These situations thus contained elements of both moral spheres and were affected by moral norms associated with each one of them. They were hence morally ambiguous. There is a large offshore fishing fleet in addition to the Norwegian inshore fleet. Commercial inshore fisheries may thus also be perceived to only be a moderate case of yellow sphere activity due to their comparatively small scale.

In other words, classification according to the two moral spheres can be regarded as placement along a continuum rather than as strictly dichotomous. Activities can be perceived as *more or less* "green" or "yellow" according to the type and number of criteria they fulfil and the extent to which they fulfil them. It can thus be hypothesised that the moral sensitiveness increases as the activity gets more "yellow". Large-scale, capital intensive activities might be perceived as being so "yellow" at the outset that attempts to resolve serious economic difficulties would hardly be associated with the green sphere at all. By contrast, small-scale harvesting aimed at personal food supply constitutes an ultimate example of green sphere activity. The moral expectations of the yellow sphere do thus not apply to subsistence harvesting, and the household poacher is consequently not met with reproach.

The extreme moral condemnation of the commercial poachers in Newfoundland is interesting in this respect. The Newfoundland cod stock is perceived to be a vital common good which people suffer to protect. People experienced commercial poaching as undermining of this collective effort and as a threat to the common good. People perceived commercial poaching as allowing for the kind of greed that they saw as the cause of the cod crisis. Furthermore, the Newfoundland cod stock has traditionally been the basis of household fisheries as well as commercial fisheries, which makes the distinction between the two economies conspicuous. The combination of these two

factors brought the latent perceived impurity of money into salience, giving money some independent moral significance. That situation thus triggered a moral “chain reaction”, which made many dimensions of the yellow sphere become morally relevant. The commercial poacher was not only condemned because he poached on a large scale and thus possibly harmed the resource. The moral meaning of this activity as well as of its scale was influenced by the fact that he did it for money.

It is suggested that the findings in the two communities reflect patterns that we can expect to be general to this kind of communities. The theory of the two moral spheres of economic activity applies primarily to economies which include both production for the market as well as for subsistence. It can thus be hypothesised that the distinction between the two moral spheres is most relevant in communities where activities in the green sphere can be classified as *primarily economic* – which means that the activities are performed for subsistence rather than recreation – and where activities in the green sphere have a meaningful relationship with activities in the yellow sphere. One could for instance imagine a more urbanised setting in which the economy was based on secondary and tertiary industries and where food fishery was done basically for recreation. In that case, food would be connected only to the outcome and not the motive for the harvesting activity. It is thus reasonable to assume that the moral meaning of the green sphere will be somewhat less prominent. Such a setting would lack the features which make the securing of a satisfactory economic outcome become relevant in connection with fishing, as well as a salient distinction between commercial and subsistence harvesting. There is reason to believe that the model of the two moral spheres of economic activity would be less useful as a tool for understanding moral codes of behaviour in such a setting. Nonetheless, if a previously recreational poacher started poaching commercially, it is likely that the level of moral condemnation would increase substantially also in an urban or suburban milieu.

This is a study of communities in traditionally Christian Western societies. The historical and religious backgrounds for the common morality of these cases are thus drawn from that legacy of thought. However, it is fair to hypothesise that largely similar moral distinctions can be found in societies with different historical and religious roots. The basic moral values underlying Norwegian and Canadian fishers' ethics of compliance are common to most cultures and religions. It has also been argued that the meanings of food and money have general secular roots. However, how these basic values shape the more specific moral rules of different societies may vary. Only further in-depth studies can answer the questions of how much and in what ways.

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